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Traveling with Friends: Becoming God's Holy People Together

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The

Holy Life

Bible Study Series

TRAVELING WITH FRIENDS

Becoming God's
Holy People
Together

BOOK

3

FRANK MOORE

Living in a Community of Faith

Acts 2:42-47; Eph. 4:11-13

In Book 1 of this Bible study series, *God's Road Map for Us*, we looked at God's original plan for humanity, our rejection of that plan, and His efforts at getting us back on track. That plan emphasized our relationship with Him. Most of the Scripture studies in Book 1 focused on Old Testament passages. Even the New Testament passages we considered referenced concepts from the Old Testament.

In Book 2 of this Bible study series, *The Journey Within*, we looked at holiness from the perspective of individual believers. We shifted our attention to studies in the New Testament and emphasized God's desire that we live holy lives. Rather than decreasing the emphasis on holiness, He actually increased it to include even more facets of our lives than the Old Testament considered.

In Book 3 we turn our attention to holiness as we live it in the Christian community and the world. Over the past 500 years, a flaw has crept into Christian thinking—individual faith has been emphasized to the neglect and sometimes the exclusion of corporate faith. Christians today must regain a proper understanding of corporate faith to live biblical lives.

The Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment introduced many new insights into Christian thought. Perhaps the biggest mistake we made as we incorporated these new insights came by placing so much attention on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ that we narrowed our focus to defining Christianity only in terms of "Jesus and me." In this way, we tended to make the journey of faith from here to heaven a solitary one. God does not intend for our holiness adventure with Him to be a solitary one. We're traveling with friends. While faith in Jesus Christ is a personal matter, we do

not make the journey by ourselves. We really do need each other.

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. In what ways do we tend to place emphasis on a solitary faith?
2. What errors result from emphasizing only a solitary faith?
3. What correctives do a proper understanding of corporate faith bring?
4. How are you encouraged by the reminder that you're not on this spiritual journey alone?

READ ACTS 2:42-47

Acts 2 begins with Jesus' disciples praying together in one place and in unity of heart. The middle portion of the chapter describes the events surrounding the birthday of the Church. The chapter ends with a snapshot of this community of believers. Notice the activities in which they participated together.

1. The apostles' teaching. This refers to the gospel message with primary emphasis on the death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and coming again of Jesus Christ. As you read the Book of Acts, you hear this message presented in various set-

tings as the disciples take the gospel message to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and across the entire Roman Empire.

GROUP DISCUSSION

What activities in today's Christian Church correlate to the Early Church believers devoting themselves to the gospel message?

2. Fellowship. The rest of Acts 2 and the remainder of the Book of Acts illustrate this important feature of the Early Church. The early believers enjoyed fellowship both in corporate worship and in social life. They spent a lot of time together praising God as well as talking, laughing, and eating. They also looked out for the material needs of one another. The thrust of verses 44-45 calls attention not so much to communism as to responding to one another's needs.

GROUP DISCUSSION

What activities in today's Church correlate to the Early Church believers' devoting of themselves to fellowship?

3. The breaking of bread. This phrase appears again in verse 46. Both the context and the use of the original language imply a difference in meaning. Verse 46 refers to sharing meals together in a social setting, as in a potluck fellowship dinner or having another family into your home for a meal. Verse 42 refers to sharing together in communion or the Lord's Supper. Records from Early Church history indicate that early disciples took Jesus' command seriously to "do this

in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). Acts 20:7 illustrates believers in Troas taking communion as a regular part of their worship.

GROUP DISCUSSION

What activities in today's Church correlate to the Early Church believers devoting themselves to the breaking of bread?

4 Prayer. We know the importance of personal prayer in an individual's religious life. But what about corporate prayer? Do we really need it? I mean, does corporate prayer provide blessings and benefits not found in individual prayer alone? Apparently the early disciples believed it did. It's listed here as one of the most important things they did when they got together. As you study the Book of Acts, you see the Early Church getting together often to pray. We find them praying together in the upstairs room prior to the arrival of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14). Peter and John prayed together in Acts 3:1. In Acts 6:4, the 12 disciples enlisted the help of others so they could devote themselves more fully to prayer. The Early Church earnestly prayed together during Peter's imprisonment (Acts 12:5). Paul and his group prayed with believers at Philippi in Acts 16:13.

GROUP DISCUSSION

What activities in today's Church correlate to the Early Church believers' devoting of themselves to prayer?

Notice in Acts 2:46-47 the effect of their activity together.

1. The group experienced gladness and sincerity of heart.
2. They reached a focal point of praising God.
3. Outsiders looked on them with favor.
4. New people accepted Christ regularly and joined their fellowship.

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Look back over this entire passage of scripture. Describe in your own words the central features of this community of believers.
2. In what ways were these early believers like your own community of faith?
3. In what ways were these early believers different from your own community of faith?

READ EPH. 4:11-13

We studied Eph. 4:11-13 in a different context in Book 2 of this Bible study series. Since we've already looked at this passage in detail, we won't study every insight found here. Rather, as we consider the passage again, note that this community of believers is called "the body of Christ." Imagine that! We who follow Him on this earth are called His body. This passage emphasizes that believers have different gifts and abilities. God has a place for each one of us in His kingdom work.

Paul explains the "body of Christ" metaphor in 1 Cor. 12:12-31. We all have strengths and responsibilities. Like the variety of instruments it takes to make a good orchestra, the Body of Christ consists of the diverse variety of people who call themselves followers of Jesus.

Notice the goal Paul mentions in Eph. 4:13. God wants His followers to come to a point of unity both in their spiritual beliefs and in their social life together. He wants them to share a common knowledge about His Son, Jesus. He wants them to mature in their faith. And He wants their lives to reflect the image of Christ. They can't do all of this by themselves. They need one another to accomplish this God-given goal.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Give each class member a note card. Ask each member to write his or her answer to the following question:

After studying a variety of scriptures in this week's study, see if you can give new insight to this important question: "Why is a community of faith essential to individuals' faith?"

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; Col. 1:24-29

FURTHER QUESTIONS

Take a moment at the conclusion of the session to encourage class participants to place their unanswered questions on note cards, along with this session number. They should then place their cards in an "odds and ends" box provided by the Bible study leader. Attention will be given to these questions in the last session of this study.